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THE FRENCH PEACE COMMISSIONERS

By MARCEL KNECHT

THE representatives of France at the Paris Conference typify certain qualities of the French people which we as Frenchmen have come to believe as thoroughly characteristic.

The President of the French Republic, Mr. Raymond Poincaré, who opened the Peace Conference by a masterly speech, represents the lofty and supple intelligence of his country; Premier Georges Clémenceau—a wounded of the war—President of the Delegation, personifies, in the opinion of the world, as well as France, patriotism in its noblest aspect. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Stephen Pichon, and the Minister of Finance, Mr. Klotz, contribute extraordinary diplomatic knowledge, lucid reasoning, and the spirit of justice.

A great friend of America during the war, Mr. André Tardieu, not only stands out splendidly as the champion of the courageous youth of 1914, but above all, as the creative energy needed for the moral and material reconstruction of the nation.

Ambassador Jules Cambon, better acquainted with perfidious German diplomacy than any other Frenchman, and who learned to appreciate the United States while he was in Washington, combines with his wisdom and idealism a fund of good sense.

Another eminent Ambassador, Mr. J. J. Jusserand, although he takes no part in the Conference, accompanied President Wilson, whose fellow-countryman he might have been had not his love for France been stronger than his affection for the land of Washington and Emerson.

Two diplomats, the pride of the Quai d'Orsay, Messrs. Dutasta, Ambassador to Switzerland, and Philippe Ber-

thelot, founder of the Official Bureaus of Information abroad and Director of Political Affairs, unite rare experience with the clear-sighted vision that is needed for a task of such tremendous import.

Very close to the Delegation, Mr. Léon Bourgeois, author of a draft of a Society of Nations, and a high authority in matters of law, contributes a wide humanitarianism.

In the Parliament, which is only separated from the Quai d'Orsay by the residence of Mr. Paul Deschanel, the Commission on Foreign Affairs has great figures of former Cabinets, Mr. Aristide Briand, Mr. Louis Barthou, Mr. Henry Franklin Bouillon. And dominating the Conference itself, our beloved Marshal Foch, our victorious generalissimo, symbolizes in the present and in the past, better than Richelieu and Louis XIV, better than Bonaparte and Gambetta, the immortal genius of the land that gave birth to Roland, Joan of Arc and Guynemer.

These then are the men who are working side by side with their allies and comrades to clarify in terms of lasting peace the purposes that the guns spoke out across the fields of France.

PRESIDENT RAYMOND POINCARÉ—I.

It is many a day since at Bar-le-Duc, in that historic region of the Meuse, a young boy with eyes of singular gravity, intelligent mouth, and forehead that showed even then his strength of purpose, was studying eagerly and systematically under the guidance of a most admirable mother. Such a mother of France and Lorraine she was as truly represents all those who throughout history have created and cultivated the intelligence and heart of the children of France. The little boy from the Meuse had constantly before his eyes the strong and simple life of his parents, whose existence was a series of sacrifices joyfully accepted for the greater benefit of those who were to carry on the family.

The Poincaré family were famous in the department of the Meuse for their intelligence. At Bar-le-Duc, and afterwards at the University of Nancy, worthy successor of the Strasbourg alma mater, the young Raymond Poincaré was a source of astonishment to his masters on account of his

insatiable desire for scholarship and capacity for sounding the depths of knowledge; above all, for his vast intelligence, with its marvelous suppleness in adapting itself to the varied aspects of life.

As the young University graduate, somewhat weakened by nights devoted to study but happy in the consciousness of knowledge gained, spent some months at the home of his uncle, Dr. Poincaré, a distinguished physician of Nancy, and in the more polished setting of the capital of Lorraine he was better able than in the provincial milieu of Bar-le-Duc, to give full vent to his creative imagination and to the fancy of his literary dreams.

The sons of the Meuse, like those of Lorraine, possess wonderful qualities: they brave every danger and defy every obstacle. When an obstacle does happen to be unsurmountable, they bide their time, wait in silence, prepare for attack, and sometimes at the end of forty-seven years one of them reconquers his beloved city of Metz and the annexed territory.

This extraordinary optimism, this indifference of the true son of the soil to the eternal changes brought about by time and destiny, was also taught to the young school-boy, Poincaré, by the history of his province.

Poincaré served his term of military duty, and in 1879-1880 was first a private, and then a corporal in the famous 26th Infantry Regiment, one of the four glorious regiments of the Iron Division.

An intelligence sustained by patriotism and sane democracy will expand, then soar, then dominate. The excellent student, the undergraduate who carried off every honor, the good soldier, was soon to become one of the greatest lawyers of France and of Europe. Working side by side with such men as Millerand, Waldeck-Rousseau, Viviani, Mr. Raymond Poincaré brought to his profession an extraordinary legal diagnosis, an irrefutable documentation, prodigious good sense, a profound knowledge of his mother tongue and masterly oratory, and to this array of qualifications may be added a clear voice, vibrant with nervous strength, capable of moving the most sceptical audiences. It is a characteristic of all the Poincarés, from the great scientist, Henri Poincaré, to the President and his brother, Lucien, General Director of Public Education, that the eyes, energetic and serious, slant slightly up-

wards towards the temples, giving to the expression an originality that reveals the richness of their imagination.

This imagination of Raymond Poincaré is seen also in a gift for word painting, inspired by the purest classicism—such were the qualities of the lawyer, who soon left the Bar for politics.

First a General Councilor, then Deputy for the Department of Meuse, with Commercy and St. Mihiel, finally a Senator, Mr. Raymond Poincaré was still in the flush of his youth and ardor when he was appointed member of one cabinet after another, showing rare ability as an organizer. Like a true Lorrainer, the new cabinet member would first examine and investigate, and instead of destroying the work of his predecessor, he would improve, renew, and modify it without breaking the necessary links that must unite the unstable present to the past, sacred heritage of the race.

The confidence of the French Parliament and the admiration of the élite gave him in 1912 the important ministry of Foreign Affairs and the presidency of the Council of Ministers, or premiership. After the disquieting threats of Germany in 1904, 1908 and 1911, the Premier in power in 1912 had a very heavy task before him.

The more intelligent Frenchmen, and Mr. Poincaré was at their head, felt that a German attack was impending; the more idealistic refused to believe in it and were generously trying to prepare for world peace by a superior kind of internationalism.

Premier Poincaré, while he secretly longed for the liberation of humanity, did not wish to compromise the immediate security of the country, and through his fortunate negotiations with Great Britain, Russia, and Italy, before relinquishing his premiership in 1913, he had greatly strengthened France's position in Europe.

That same year Raymond Poincaré was triumphantly elected President of the Republic by the French people. France, by allowing her choice to fall on this Lorrainer of great intellect, showed the world in a pacific way that she would continue to struggle for the maintenance of peace, but with dignity and without renouncing anything.

The 1914 elections proved to an astonished world the innocence—the naïveté almost—of the masses of the people, who opposed the deputies in favor of the law for a

three-year term of compulsory military service. Poincaré had need of all his solid optimism, all his faith in our country to keep from despairing of the future.

After his trip to Russia in July, 1914, he returned suddenly, and acclaimed by the population of Paris, gravely took his place in his beloved France, who realized at last the ineffectiveness of the olive branch and took up the sword of older days, a little rusty in parts, but shining with patriotism.

Then the Barbarians lit their fires of destruction and began their slaughter. And the fire and slaughter went on for over four long years. But like the sacred flame of the Vestals, French intelligence was still burning; it began grouping hostile parties, bringing provinces nearer together, strengthening alliances and Ententes.

During the entire war, this intelligence has never ceased manifesting itself in the councils of the nation. Foch, Joffre, and Pétain never appealed to it in vain; Viviani called it into play to put on a solid basis the "Sacred Union," which we used to speak of before the war as the "Franco-French Entente." Briand, Ribot, Painlevé, and especially Clémenceau, realized that they must coöperate with this permanent force, which was protecting Right.

Several fine books on education, patriotism, the soul of French democracy, made the name of Poincaré, already famous as that of a statesman, rank also among professional writers. The French Academy, that illustrious assembly of all our national glories, admitted him within doors that have ever been jealously guarded by dignity, taste and tradition.

Although the Constitution does not vest the President of the French Republic with the same powers as the American Constitution gives the President of the United States, yet Mr. Raymond Poincaré, since August 1st, 1914, has weathered the furious storms that have shaken his country, and has held the helm with a firm hand, eyes ever fixed on the distant port of Victory.

MARCEL KNECHT.